

INTERVISTE

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## The contributions of Chinese anthropology

A conversation between Roberto Malighetti and Yang Shengmin

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**ABSTRACT:** This article is the product of a long-term relationship between Prof. Yang Shengmin (Minzu University of China) and Prof. Roberto Malighetti (University of Milano-Bicocca). It is the outcome of a scientific collaboration that started in 2012 in Beijing, continued with the conference *Anthropologies From in China. The First Italian Conference* (University of Milano-Bicocca, 13.12. 2013), and was consolidated by the didactic activities at the Minzu University of China. It took the present form in the course of a conversation in the offices of the Collaborative Innovation Center for Ethnic Minority Development (Minzu University, Beijing) on the 6th of June 2016. Transcribed and then revised by both authors, the text considers the importance of Chinese anthropology and its contribution to the international dialogue. It probes the possibilities open to Chinese anthropology to offer an original articulation of its tradition with the Western influences that accompanied, from the very beginning, the development of anthropology in China. The Chinese innovative proposals are synthetized under three approaches: the historical, the Marxist, the applied, and the study of minorities.

**KEYWORDS:** CHINESE ANTHROPOLOGY, HISTORY, MARXISM, APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY, MINORITIES AND ETHNIC GROUPS.

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**ROBERTO MALIGHETTI** – From the very beginning Chinese anthropology developed its positions in a constant dialogue with Western anthropology. It followed the major paradigm shifts that marked the history of the discipline. It seems that the introduction into China of the first anthropological book was the translation of a text written by a German scholar, Michael Haberlandt, entitled *Ethnology*. Published in 1903, it provided a survey of the ethnic groups of the world. The first Chinese scholar to use the word "anthropology" was Sun Xuewu in an article published in 1916 by the magazine of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. It was entitled *An Introduction to Anthropology* and it dealt with the state of the art of European and American anthropology (Liu Mingxin 2014; Malighetti 2014).

**YANG SHENGMIN** – In China, anthropology and ethnology took their first steps at the turn of the Nineteenth and the Twentieth century, in close connection with Western classical ethnology. The institutions and the research centers interpreted the scientific systems and the anthropological theories elaborated in Europe and North America. Historians distinguish the School of the South, considered the original source of the discipline, from the School of the North, based in Yanjing University. The first was mainly influenced by American diffusionism, the second by structural-functionalism. At the same time they began a long process of emancipation from Western ethnology which led to the definition, in the late Thirties, of quite original perspectives (Yang Shengmin 2003).

**R. M.** – The School of the South was created by Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) who, after having served as Minister of Education in the provisional nationalist government (1912), founded in 1928 the Academia Sinica. In 1934 he established a Department of Anthropology, dedicated to the study of Chinese minorities. In a 1926 article he introduced the term Ethnology and identified it with the study of minorities (Cai Yuanpei 1926). The School of the South embraced Anglo-American diffusionism and studied the history of the ethnic groups, the problems of cultural transmission, internal migrations and Chinese national integration. The School of the North, on the other hand, concentrated especially on the study of rural communities, border areas and ethnic minorities. It was directed by Wu Wenzao (1901-1985) who trained some of the most important Chinese anthropologists: Fei Xiaotong (1910-2005), Lin Yaohua (1910-2000) and Li Anzhai (1900-1985) (Hu Hongbao, Wang Jianmin, Zhang Haiyang 2006).

**Y. S.** – The distinction between the two schools is not only theoretical and methodological. It also refers to their research interests. The School of the South focused on Eastern and Southern China. It was deeply influenced by American historiography. It applied an historical approach and emphasized the use of archaeological materials and the study of ancient literature. It did research around themes such as the origin of the Chinese ethnic groups and their interrelations. For this School the study of national history was part of the field of ethnology. The School of the North, on the other hand, took European functionalism as its main analytical tool and favored theoretical interpretations, going beyond the phenomenal basis to analyze the connections and the links between empirical cases. It also paid great attention to historical texts. The School of the North believed that the study of the past did not have to be restricted to the analysis of social and cultural evolution, but, rather, could be employed to explain contemporary society (Yang Shengmin 2014).

**R. M.** – The protagonists of both orientations developed their prospects in close relationship with the West. Cai Yuanpei completed his education in Europe. He studied philosophy and anthropology at the University of Leipzig (Germany) between 1906 and 1909 and repeatedly visited Germany and France (1911-1915). Fu Sinian (1896–1950), the first director of the Institute of History and Philology of the Academia Sinica, studied experimental psychology at the University College, London (1920-23). Li Ji (1896–1979), occupied the first Chinese chair of anthropology at Nankai University (Tianjin), after having earned his doctorate at Harvard (1923). Ling Chunsheng (1902–1981), studied in France. Similarly, the funder and first director of the School of the North, Wu Wenzao, after graduating from Tsinghua University (Beijing) in 1923, studied with Franz Boas at Columbia University, where he gained his Ph.D degree. Wu encouraged the international mobility of his students, facilitating their contact with the most prominent foreign intellectuals: Li Anzhai obtained his Ph.D in 1947 at Yale University under the supervision of Sapir, after having studied at Berkeley with Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie; in 1940 Lin Yaohua completed his PhD thesis (printed in English in 1948) under the direction of Raymond Firth; Fei Xiaotong studied with Malinowski and obtained his PhD degree at the London School of Economics in 1938, with a work published in English the following year. Wu was also a great promoter of an efficient policy of what today we call academic internationalization. Shortly before the constitution of the Association of Chinese Ethnologists in 1934 and of the foundation of its journal in 1936 (*Bulletin of Ethnology*), he brought to Yanjing University some of the most distinguished

social scientists of the time: Robert Parkin in 1932, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown in 1935, Leslie White between 1937 and 1939.

After the foundation of the People Republic of China the perspectives changed, but the importance of the European theoretical influences remained very strong, especially the Soviet understanding of Marxism.

**Y. S.** – Chinese ethnology was renewed with the establishment of the New China in 1949. From a theoretical point of view, it adopted the model and the system of the Soviet school and developed in opposition to “Western bourgeois ethnology”. It elaborated Marxist thought, its vision of the world and its methodology, particularly historical materialism, mixing it with local characteristics and with a strong emphasis on ethnographic research.

Marxism and ethnology are the products of the same modern era: both belong to the middle of the nineteenth century. Marx and Engels made extensive use of ethnological materials<sup>1</sup>. They utilized ethnological data to provide interpretations of human society and of the laws of evolution<sup>2</sup>. Their texts were used by the Soviet school and articulated with the prospects of the European geographical school. Soviet ethnology, until the dissolution of the Union, formed the mainstream of Marxist ethnology. It focused its research on the traditional cultures of the ethnic minorities, on the historical approach and on the study of ecological problems.

After World War II, with the change of the international order, the driving force of national liberation movements gave great importance to Marxism. However, even if some Western ethnologists began to apply Marxist concepts, Marxist ethnological thought was relegated to a marginal place, excluded from the dominant Western currents of thought and from the educational systems. The reasons are many. Surely a key role was played by the impact of the Cold War on ethnological research. The state of tension between the two blocks also influenced the Soviet scholars, inducing an oppositional attitude towards Western colleagues. The failure to communicate compromised the development of the discipline. It also impeded the full maturation of the Marxist school, not only from a theoretical and methodological point of view but also from the point of view of its results. With the founding of

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1. The main references are: Lewis H. Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877), Henry Summer Maine's *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions* (1875) and John Lubbock's *Prehistoric times* (1865).

2. Of great ethnological relevance are two books written by Engels: *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) and *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). See also Marx's “Conspectus of Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society*” in *Marx Engels On Literature and Art* (1976) and *The Ethnological Notebook of Carl Marx*, edited by Lawrence Krader (1972).

New China, history gave to Chinese ethnology the task of developing the heritage of Marxist ethnology and of creating a school that could efficiently combine theory and practice.

**R. M.** – The specificity of the Chinese anthropological tradition has always grounded itself in the ethnographic studies of the different groups that compose Chinese reality. The 1952 reform of higher education integrated anthropology (人类学), considered a “bourgeois pseudo-science”, into the discipline of ethnology (民族学), together with most of the other social sciences. Ethnology was conceived to be the study of *minzu* (民族), a complex and controversial term that can be translated with nation, minority or ethnic group<sup>3</sup>. Most of the scholars were brought together within the Research Division of the Central Institute for Minorities of the Minzu University, founded that same year. Under the guidance of the leading masters of the time, scientists participated in several government initiatives aimed at the understanding of Chinese ethnic groups and at the construction of national unity. Among them, two major projects were particularly important: *The Nationality Identification Project and The Research Project for the Histories of Ethnic Minorities*<sup>4</sup>. Soviet historical teleology and the conjugation of Engels’ model of social evolution with those of Morgan and Stalin were used to identify the different *minzu* on the basis of their modes of production: primitive, slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist. In New China the initial paradigm was based on the four commonalities defined by Joseph Stalin: common language, common territory, common economic life, common psychological conformation.

**Y. S.** – The Research Division of the Central Institute for Minorities (Minzu University) was founded in 1952. Later, the name changed several times, from Institute of Ethnological Research to Department of Ethnology and then to School of Ethnology and Sociology. From its foundation, Minzu University has been the symbol of Chinese ethnology. This institution was the first school of ethnology and the first research center of the New China. It is also the first to have brought together eminent scholars of ethnology, sociol-

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3. Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925), the founding father of the Republic of China and its first president, seems to have introduced the concept *minzu*, deriving it from the Japanese word *minzoku* that designate the “nation”. He used it as a tool to mobilize the Chinese people against the imperial Manchu government of the Qing dynasty (Guldin 1990).

4. These projects were conceived to serve the interests of the nation building agenda along with the understanding and governance of the non-Han peoples. They registered more than 400 separate groups and started the identification of the minorities that compose today’s China: 41 minorities were recognized in the first census of 1953, and 53 in that of 1964. The 1982 and 1990 censuses recognized the 56 minorities that formally exist now (Yang Sheng-min 1994, 2003).

ogy, anthropology, history and languages of minority groups. Among the most distinguished scholars there are Wu Wenzao, Fei Xiaotong, Lin Yaohua, Jian Bozan, Wu Zelin, Feng Jiasheng, Wang Zhonghan, Suluo Cheng, Chen Yongling, Song Shuhua.

Fei Xiaotong, who was deputy director of Minzu University, became director of the School and strongly promoted the ethnographic research. Minzu University became one of the most important consultative institutions for national policies on ethnic issues. Its scholars were involved in a number of important government initiatives, such as those you mentioned: *The Nationality Identification Project* and *The Research Project for the Histories of Ethnic Minorities*. They also produced the many volumes of the *Translation Series of Ethnic Issue and Collected Papers on China's Ethnic Issues*. In 1956, the center founded New China's first academic structure specialized in training scholars on how to do ethnographic research. Based on a Marxist model, the studies on Chinese society started to build a new perspective on anthropology.

The path was interrupted in 1957 when the "anti-rightist campaign" affected the major scholars, including Wu Wenzao, Pan Guangdan, Yang Chen-zhi and Fei Xiaotong. Moreover, after the break between the Chinese Communist Party and the Soviet Union (1961), the Soviet school was declared "bourgeois and revisionist". Ethnology was integrated in so-called "ethnic studies" that mixed different disciplines such as anthropology, history, philosophy, economics and literature. This situation lasted until the changes that occurred after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

**R. M.** – With Deng Xiaoping's 1978 "reforms and opening-up" policies, Minzu University renewed its importance. In this period you started to play a relevant role inside Minzu University where you first registered as a Master's student in the History of Chinese Minority Nationalities, then as a Ph.D student in Anthropology, under the supervision of Lin Yaohua. Later you became Professor and then Dean of the School of Ethnology and Sociology, as well as Director of the Institute of the Strategic Studies on Ethnic Issues and of many other Institutes that you founded or participated in founding. Recently you created the Collaborative Innovation Center for Ethnic Minority Development.

**Y. S.** – In 1980 the Division of Central Minority Institute Research was renamed the Institute of Ethnological Research and was placed under the direction of Lin Yaohua (1983). The following year the first doctoral school was established. In 1985 the Institute introduced specializations in archaeology and museology. In 1986 the directorship passed to Wang Furen and the uni-



versity system was structured in four levels: undergraduate, master, doctoral and post-doctoral. In 1988, the National Education Commission recognized the School of Ethnology of Minzu University as the most important ethnological institution in the country and as a strategic institution for the national interest. In 1992, the department was directed by Ma Qicheng, Zhuang Kongzhao, Song Shuhua and, from 1996 to 2011, by myself. In 1993, with the approval of the National Commission for Education, Minzu University established the School for Ethnological Research, divided into two sections: the Department of Ethnology and the Institute of Ethnology. The School also included the Center for Ethnic Policies, the Department of Tibetan Studies, the Department of Museology and the Department of Archaeology.

Over the last 30 years the growth and development of the School reflected and contributed to the rapid expansion of anthropology and ethnology throughout China. The number of students and researchers passed from 300 to 1000. Since then, the graduate school of Ethnology of Minzu University has been ranked first in the listing of the institutions of higher education of the Ministry of Education. Today it is the largest institution for ethnological study in China, and is in the forefront both for the number of ethnographic works, and for the numbers of researchers and professors. It has four doctoral programs (ethnology, cultural anthropology, sociology, ethno-sociology) and six masters (ethnology, anthropology, ethno-sociology, sociology, ethnology of cultural heritage, archeology and museology).

**R. M.** – Starting from the end of the Seventies there has been a progressive increase in the number of institutions and scholars throughout China. In 1981 the department of anthropology of Zhongshan University (Guangzhou, Guangdong Province) reopened. The same year the Society of Chinese Anthropology was established at Xianmen University, where the First National Symposium of Anthropology was organized and a new department of anthropology was created in 1984. Over the following years new departments were established in different universities (for example: Shanghai, Nanjing, Sichuan, Wuhan, Shandong, Yunnan, Tsinghua). In 1993 the Institute of Sociology of the University of Beijing was renamed “Institute of Sociology and Anthropology”. In that same period the main national institutions of social research such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), organized different anthropology programs.

Your generation, who came after the 1978 reforms, continued the work of the great masters of the past. It increased the dialogue with perspectives elaborated internationally. You yourself spent a considerable amount of time

working abroad. I recall your collaborations as a Visiting Professor at Simon Frazer University (Canada), at Stanford and Columbia University (USA), at the Max-Planck Institute of Ethnology (Germany) and at Aichi University (Japan). In addition to participating in numerous international conferences and congresses (included the one we held in Milan-Bicocca University in 2013) you have worked in several international cooperation projects financed by prestigious Institutions (among them the Ford Foundation, UNESCO).

**Y. S.** – In the thirty years that followed 1978, Chinese ethnology entered a very fertile phase, consistent with the international importance achieved by China. Chinese anthropology increased his influence in the international arena. In 2009 the Chinese Association of Ethnology and Anthropology organized in the city of Kunming (Yunnan) the Sixteenth World Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES). More than six thousand people attended it. This was a significant step toward the international recognition of Chinese ethnology and anthropology.

**R. M.** – Anthropology as a discipline originated in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the expansion of European economic and political interests. It qualified itself as a specifically modern and Eurocentric perspective toward what is not modern, denying the possibility to analyze modernity (like the eye cannot see itself). This new form of rationality attempted to understand other people's cultures, guaranteeing a division of labor between anthropology and sociology according to the motto: "sociology studies the west, anthropology all the rest". The functionalist school encouraged the analysis of discrete, self-contained and homogeneous cultures in ways congruent with the pragmatism of the colonial governance (Malighetti 2001).

When, after the Second World War, the center of the world moved from Europe to the United States, the general headquarters of knowledge migrated there. The profound political and social changes as well as those related to the scientific status of knowledge substantially modified the discipline. The definition of anthropology was emancipated from the examination of a specific type of society. It grounded itself on the elaboration of a transversal viewpoint that crosses every society, including the scientist's own. What was initially defined as the analysis of complex societies took the form of the analysis of the complexity of all societies and cultures.

Now that the centers of the world are shifting and multiplying, deleting the colonial dichotomy between center and periphery, the anthropology of the disciplinary traditions once described as "minor" have unique opportunities to expound the scientific dialogue. In this context I think Chinese anthropology has a crucial role to play.



**Y. S.** – Scientific thoughts and theories are the product of their cultural and historical contexts. Ethnology originated in the context of the colonial expansion. Still today its objects, theories and research methods bear the marks of the colonial thought. After the end of World War II, Western ethnology turned gradually towards the analysis of modern societies. It continued to use concepts and values derived from the analysis of the so-called primitive societies, to endorse Western expansion worldwide. It played an important role in the affirmation of the superiority of the West and of the supposed universalism of its culture.

Ethnology is at the base of Western cultural hegemony. It acted efficiently despite the fact that, according to the same scientific value system, it cannot be considered objective and neutral. Malinowski taught us to consider anthropology as a modern science, based on empirical researches and on fieldwork. Anthropologists thought that their discipline was able to explain all kinds of societies, to understand their different features, and to explain the reasons for these differences. They considered, proudly, that their researches could produce a rational and certain knowledge.

However, the criticisms that arose in the Eighties of the anthropological perspectives, mainly coming from the so-called “interpretive turn” and from postmodernism, gradually eroded the optimism of classical ethnology, showing its limits and shortcomings. They posed important questions, raising serious doubts about the scientific reliability and objectivity of the ethnographies. Obviously these perspectives themselves have strong limitations. The same Clifford Geertz who criticized earlier anthropological perspectives never provided clear and comprehensive explanations of his own theories and methods. His legacy has been taken up also by “hyper-interpretive approaches” and forms of epistemological and methodological nihilism that came to reject the same practice of fieldwork. This I think it is very dangerous for our discipline. Anthropology cannot exist without long and sound fieldwork.

In spite of this, the critical debate that postmodernism introduced in anthropology pushed the discipline to reconsider its foundations. It also contributed to encourage Chinese ethnology and anthropology to deepen their experience and to develop their own perspectives.

**R. M.** – Chinese anthropology as a whole has always tried to develop its discourse interpreting and elaborating the Western influences in original terms. From the very beginning Wu Wenzao and his students sought to propose an open model capable to think the national question from the point of view of a culturally complex China. Writing in reaction to the first republican

nationalist policies, Wu conceived of the reality of China using the principle of “unity amidst diversity” (多元一体). To this end, he used the concept of *Tianxia* (天下), literally “under the sky”, coined in the period of the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BC), to comprehend and integrate the entire geographical and cultural space. In his first article, written when he was a student at Columbia University, he criticized the European theories of the Nation-State. In this essay, *The Nation and the State*, published in 1926 in the Chinese Overseas Chinese Student Union Journal, he opposed the Nationalist Party’s conceptions, and proposed the idea of China as an example of a State consisting of a variety of nations (Wu 1926; Malighetti, Wang Mingming 2014). Wu’s ideas were later taken up and developed by Fei Xiaotong and articulated in complex ways. Fei articulated his conceptions to underline the intercultural fusions in manners that influenced prestigious foreign scholars such as Skinner (Skinner 1964). In his work on what he called the Tibet-Yi corridor, Fei refused to consider as “isolated” the areas that begin in the north, on the border of Gansu, Qinghai and Sichuan, and end up in the southeast of Tibet and northwest of Yunnan. Instead, he saw these areas as places of old and intensive contacts between cultures, populated by ethnic groups and nationalities closely connected and interrelated by history (Fei Xiaotong 1989).

While the European functionalist anthropologies were worried about putting their objects of analysis in closed units, with well-defined and discrete boundaries, Chinese scholars were already developing complex and, in many ways, pioneering positions, anticipating some contemporary reflections.

**Y. S.** – For a century, the establishment of a Chinese School of anthropology and ethnology has been a dream pursued by several generations. Today international anthropology develops very slowly. I want to contend that it is unable to deal with the big problems that cross national borders and face humanity as a whole: poverty, economic development, environmental degradation. In this respect I think Chinese anthropology can make important contributions. Its use of Marxism can be very effective in understanding the global situation. Marxism allows for the connecting of ethnography to larger problems, the micro to the macro, the local with the global. It does not deal only with the specific groups that have power. It considers the majority, those who do not have it.

Chinese research centers are working hard to develop their own theories, to sharpen their own values, to elaborate their understanding of the world and to leave their mark in the international flows of knowledge. This is not

mere vainglory or nationalism. Rather it comes from the need to enrich scientific dialogue and to develop Chinese society. The road to the establishment of a Chinese anthropological perspective is long and difficult. But the elaboration of Chinese contributions, at a national and at an international level, is not only our duty and responsibility, but also an opportunity and an honor.

**R. M.** – As early as 1938 Bronislaw Malinowski formulated a very positive comment on the anthropology of China. In the preface of the book of his Chinese student Fei Xiaotong, he stated that “independently and spontaneously there had been organized in China a sociological attack on real problems of culture and applied anthropology, an attack which embodies all my dreams and desiderata” (Malinowski 1939:7). Maurice Freedman took this consideration out of oblivion after 25 years. In his 1962 Malinowski Memorial Lecture at the London School of Economics he foresaw the coming of “A Chinese phase in social anthropology” (Freedman 1979). Freedman argued for the importance of Chinese anthropology differently from Malinowski, who considered the works of the Chinese scholars realized in the Thirties. He mainly reflected upon the perspective of the researches conducted by foreign scholars. How would you summarize the features and the importance of the Chinese contributions to the international debate?

**Y. S.** – The main characteristics of Chinese anthropology and ethnology can be briefly considered under three headings, closely interrelated. The first is the historical approach. Chinese historical tradition is deep and rich of millenary documents. The importance of this aspect has been set off by the Schools of the South and of the North as well as by Marxist ethnology. This, by itself, is very important.

A second component of Chinese anthropology is the ethnographic study of borders areas and of ethnic groups. It began following the dramatic aggression of Japanese imperialism in Manchuria and in the Northeast. These studies also played an important role in the nation-building processes. These ethnographic researches, as we already mentioned, absorbed the energies of the Chinese ethnologists according to aims and interests that are still valid today.

Finally, an important feature of Chinese anthropology is determined by its strong applied approach. Compared with the Western colleagues, Chinese scholars have always been more interested in the application of the research to the solution of social problems. With the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the founding of the Republic, the necessity of building a new nation and a new society emerged. The war of resistance against Japan in the Thirties caused a

serious national and territorial crisis and had a profound impact on the development of the discipline. The need to resist the Japanese invasion, to fortify and protect the borders, further stimulated the involvement of the social researchers. Scholars saw in the discipline an effective means to serve society, overcoming the limitations of a purely academic interest.

**R. M.** – The three features (history, application, minorities) are well integrated into your own biography and professional career. As we already mentioned you first graduated in history (Northwest University, Xian, Shaanxi), then you received your master degree in History of Chinese Minority Nationalities (Minzu University, Beijing) and then your PhD in Anthropology (Minzu University). You continued to combine history and ethnography in your long and deep experience of fieldwork throughout China and especially on the ethnic groups of the Northwestern part of the country: on the Tajik, Tatar, Kazakh groups, and, in particular, on the Uyghur.

**Y. S.** – I was born in 1951, in a Hui area of Liaoning Province, and I grew up in Beijing near Minzu University. My middle school was Tsinghua Middle School. I wanted to study history but the cultural revolution started. I went to rural area in Xianbei province and worked there as a farmer and then as factory worker for almost 6 years. After the Cultural Revolution I started my university career, as you said, firstly as a student of history at the North-West University. In 1982 I went to Minzu, where I studied the History of the Chinese Minority Nationalities as master student and then anthropology as a PhD candidate under the supervision of Prof. Lin Yaohua. In the course of my work I tried to combine history, ethnography and application. I did this in the studies on the relations between environment and culture and then of the history of minority people in China, especially of the people of Northwest China and of the Uyghur of Xinjiang. I conducted an intense fieldwork for more than 30 years, convinced that that to understand the current situation of minority groups in China you have to deeply understand their history. My comparative approach brought me to probe into the relations between minorities, between the Han and the Mongolian, the Hui, the Tibetan and the Uyghur.

I worked on the relations between the Uyghur and the Han in collaboration with Peking University and Peking Normal University, especially with the department of psychology. We adopted a psychological approach to measure the degree of prejudices between Han and Uyghur. We found out that the prejudices between these two groups are the highest in China. Yet, they are inferior to the prejudices degree between White and Black peoples of the

United States, where the research model was originally adopted. Moreover the ethnographic evidence that results from our studies shows that the relation between the Uyghur and the Han is not so bad. I can assure that the local people would agree with this statement.

I probed into the analysis of the origin of the Uyghur people, an issue that has important political implications. There are heated discussions about this topic. Some scholars think that Uyghur are the original inhabitants of the region, and use this argument to sustain separatist strategies supported from the outside. Other scholars are convinced that the Uyghur are from the Mongolian Plateau. In my research I maintain that the historical documents, the archeological and the ethnographic data attest that Uyghur people come from Mongolia and in Xinjiang they mixed with the local people.

Our studies contradict the opinions of some political institutions, mainly outside China, like the Uyghur American Association, based in Washington DC. These associations push forward the idea of a structural hate between Han and Uyghur. They want to create two separated societies closed in the purity and authenticity of their incompatible and independent historical origins, development and cultural values. Their perspectives are not based on any empirical evidence, but, rather, on apologetic and abstract political positions. They published several articles against my work simply based on the empty assumption that I am “a liar”. I do not argue with these scholars because they cannot produce solid scientific arguments.

I think that the tensions and the problems in Xinjiang will soon be solved. I have been often asked to offer to the government and to different other institution my advices on the situation in Xinjiang. I suggested the implementation of policies based on the participation of the local people and focused on two main objectives: on the one hand economic policy and participatory development; on the other religious policies to support the local Muslim people against so-called “Islamic extremists”.

**R. M.** – You have played a meaningful role as advisor of many important institutions, national and international. You have been a consultant of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, and other government committees (for example Social Science Committee, Academy of Social Sciences Commission of Ethnology) becoming a reference point for the policies on ethnic minorities. You also collaborated with the Ministry of Education. I recall your role as director of the 985 Project to Promote the Development of the Chinese higher education system. You also worked for the Chinese ethnological and anthropological associations, as vice president of the China Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Studies and as president of the Chinese Ethnological Association.

From these perspectives you greatly promoted the development of Chinese anthropology. Your work, including your roles as editor and publisher, have been recognized nationally and internationally, through diverse awards (Ministry of Education; Turkic Uighur Youth; National Commission for outstanding research achievement award, State Ethnic Affairs Commission, the Central Political Bureau of the Central Committee). Your voice is very authoritative and very influential.

**Y. S.** – Generally most of the governments of the world do not listen to anthropologists, even if their opinions are right. If they had listened to them, there would not have been the war in Iraq, in Afghanistan or in Syria nor, as a matter of fact, dangerous events like the Three Mile Island accident. In China I have been lucky. Like many other scholars, I have had the opportunity to collaborate with the government, also at a very high level. One important moment was on 22 October 2004, when I was invited to speak in front of the Central Committee of the Communist Party together with another colleague, Prof. Hao Shiyuan (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences). After our intervention, the Secretary Hu Jintao made a speech in which he called the party and the nation to focus on the study of ethno-anthropological theories. It was the first time that the most important national leader emphasized the relevance of ethnology. This marked a very important date in the development of Chinese ethnology and of its social importance<sup>5</sup>.

However, I think that the role of the anthropologists is not to give advice only to governments. They should give advice to society as a whole. The common ideas shared inside a society can also improve governance.

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5. See *People's Daily* (人民日报), 23/10/2004.



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